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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 000724

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CVIS](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: CHARGE'S MEETING WITH VICE PRESIDENT

REF: A. A) MADRID 666

[1](#)B. B) MADRID 568

[1](#)C. C) MADRID 696

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Bob Manzanares; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Charge met with Spanish Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega on 2/22 for a review of U.S.-Spain relations and to discuss USG security, consular, and commercial priorities in Spain. Charge congratulated de la Vega on her government's success in obtaining a good turnout and a positive result in the EU's first referendum on the EU Constitution. He thanked the Vice President for Spain's participation in a PRT in western Afghanistan and urged Spain to lift its caveats on the participation of Spanish NATO officers in NATO operations in Iraq. De la Vega said that the Zapatero government would meet its obligations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, but made it clear that Zapatero will remain "consistent" with respect to barring the participation of Spanish forces in Iraq. On counterterrorism cooperation, de la Vega welcomed Charge's support for visits to Washington by Spain's Interior and Justice ministers and discussed Spanish efforts to tighten its terrorism finance laws. She urged high-level USG participation in upcoming commemoration of the Madrid March 11 train bombings, saying that attendance below cabinet level would be cast as USG insensitivity in the Spanish press. Charge briefed de la Vega on USG biometric passport requirements, criteria for Visa Waiver Program participation, and USG willingness to discuss sharing visa lookout information with Spanish authorities. Charge also discussed U.S. commercial priorities, including our concerns with an apparent Spanish shift away from a science-based approach on biotech products and our readiness to work with Spain to raise awareness on intellectual property protection issues.

[1](#)2. (C) This was a good initial meeting with Vice President de la Vega, who appears to wield considerable influence, both as Vice President and as coordinator of the Council of Ministers. She has a reputation as a tough, hard working politician with particular expertise in judicial issues. Though like many of the current set of Socialist leaders de la Vega is unfamiliar with the U.S., she was friendly and seemed well disposed to be a helpful interlocutor. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Since Zapatero took office, Vice President de la Vega has emerged as an activist leader both in the public spotlight and behind the scenes. She has taken on tough issues, such as the Basque problem and mobilizing an apathetic public to participate in the referendum on the European Constitution. She has not assumed a leading role on foreign policy issues, leaving that arena to Zapatero and Foreign Minister Moratinos, but she has an indirect influence on a wide range of issues and frequently meets with Zapatero. We sought a meeting with de la Vega in order to establish a working channel with the key day-to-day manager of the Zapatero administration and to provide her a sense of USG objectives in Spain.

[1](#)4. (C) Charge began by noting the excellent communication the Embassy enjoys with Spanish counterparts and thanking the GOS for its recent steps to improve bilateral ties. He congratulated de la Vega for Zapatero's effort to get out the vote for the referendum on the European Constitution (ref A). De la Vega described the vote as a symbol that Spain would be a permanent member of a club that seemed impossibly out of reach during the Franco dictatorship. She said the overwhelming "yes" vote in support of the Constitution was the least Spain could do to support an institution that had transformed Spain in just 30 years.

//AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ//

[1](#)5. (C) De la Vega welcomed the visit to Europe of President Bush, whom she lauded for emphasizing "the issues that unite us." Charge expressed appreciation for Spain's leadership of a PRT in Afghanistan. De la Vega said that Spain understood its obligation to help rebuild Afghanistan. Charge urged de la Vega to follow up by lifting Spain's bar on the participation of Spanish officers assigned to NATO billets in NATO operations in Iraq. De la Vega replied that "Iraq is not Afghanistan" and, while Spain would do all it could in the rebuilding of Iraq, the Zapatero government intended to

"remain consistent" regarding its position on Spanish military deployment to Iraq. She said that the Spanish MFA, MOD, and Ministry of Interior would be working together to provide training (in Spain) for Iraqi judicial and security officials.

//COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION//

16. (C) Charge said the USG was very pleased with the excellent level of cooperation between Embassy security officials and their Spanish counterparts. He said we had conveyed to the Department the interest of Minister of Interior Alonso and Justice Minister Aguilar in visiting Washington for counter-terrorism discussions and that we hoped to arrange such visits now that their USG counterparts were in place. De la Vega thanked Charge for the Embassy's support, noting that Spanish authorities had great expertise in dealing with ETA, but needed to exchange as much information as possible with the USG on the new threat posed by Islamic extremists, for the good of both countries.

17. (C) De la Vega cited Spain's success against ETA's finances as an example of a useful anti-terrorism tool that needed to be updated to confront the al-Qaida threat. Charge agreed, saying that while Spain had a very good terrorism financing law on the books, such laws would be greatly strengthened once the Interior Ministry developed implementing legislation. De la Vega, who served as Deputy Minister of Justice during the Felipe Gonzalez presidency, said the Zapatero government was evaluating whether changes would need to be made to the existing law to take into account the increased need for international coordination on terrorism financing and the emerging link between organized crime and terrorism. She noted that the March 11 train bombers had funded the operation through proceeds from drug trafficking and that several terrorist suspects had prior convictions for narcotics trafficking.

18. (C) Raising the upcoming commemoration of the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings, Charge informed de la Vega that DHS Director for International Affairs Cris Arcos would represent the USG. De la Vega thanked Charge for the information, but expressed concern that sub-cabinet representation at the event would be interpreted as a slight of Spanish victims of terrorism. Charge said that we were pleased that Ambassador Arcos would be able to attend and that misinterpretations of the level of attendance would be unfortunate, but would have no basis in fact.

//BORDER SECURITY//

19. (C) Charge said the USG was working closely with Spanish officials to help improve border security for both countries. He drew de la Vega's attention to the requirement for visa waiver countries to have a biometric passport program in place by October 25, 2005. Charge also discussed the Embassy's interest in Spain's centralization of overseas passport production and noted the USG's offer to share its visa namecheck system on a bilateral pilot basis. De la Vega agreed on the need for strong bilateral collaboration to improve border security, particularly in breaking down barriers to the smooth flow of intelligence/lookout information. She said that, like the U.S. and other countries, Spain had to work hard to improve cooperation between its intelligence and police agencies. She acknowledged that the Zapatero government's efforts to stimulate information sharing among Spanish security agencies had yielded only mixed results thus far.

//COMMERCIAL ISSUES//

110. (SBU) Charge emphasized the importance the USG placed on good trade relations with Spain and discussed biotech products and intellectual property rights as matters of particular concern. Noting that we had raised the biotech issue in a recent meeting with Minister of Agriculture Elena Espinosa (ref B), Charge explained that the delay in approval of Monsanto's NK603 corn seed variety had triggered fears among U.S. producers that Spain may be shifting away from a science-based approach to biotech goods. He also urged Spain to vote in favor of Pioneer 1507 seed applications in an upcoming EU Commission in Brussels rather than abstaining as Spain had done recently. De la Vega said that she was not an expert on biotechnology issues, but that it was her understanding that GOS officials were sorting through EU regulations to ensure that Spain was in compliance with EU protocols related to the purchase/importation of biotech goods. She promised to follow up with Minister of Agriculture Espinosa to ensure that there was no looming conflict with respect to the importation of U.S. biotech products.

111. (SBU) De la Vega indicated strong interest in and understanding of intellectual property rights issues of importance to U.S. companies. She said that a group of Spanish artists had visited her the day before to indicate

their distress over the growing problem of music/video piracy and to urge swift action by the GOS. Charge said it would be helpful to fix problems with Spain's draft law implementing the EU copyright directive. De la Vega agreed that stronger laws would help, but said that there was a more fundamental problem of getting Spanish citizens to recognize IPR violations as serious infractions. She expressed great frustration with the Spanish authorities' difficulties in making IPR cases prosecutable. She said the Zapatero government was working to improve the effectiveness of its Integrated Plan for Fighting Intellectual Property Piracy (ref C).

//COMMENT//

12. (C) This was a good initial meeting with Vice President de la Vega, who appears to wield considerable influence, both as Vice President and as coordinator of the Council of Ministers. She has a reputation as a tough, hard working politician with particular expertise in judicial issues. Though like many of the current set of Socialist leaders de la Vega is unfamiliar with the U.S., she was friendly and seemed well disposed to be a helpful interlocutor.

//BIOGRAPHIC NOTES//

13.(SBU) Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega was born in Valencia in 1949. She received a masters degree in law from Universidad Complutense in Madrid and holds a doctorate from the Universidad Central de Barcelona. She also studied international law at the University of Strasbourg.

14. (SBU) In 1979, de la Vega joined the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (the Catalan branch of PSOE) and became one of the first women to join "Democratic Justice," an association of progressive jurists known today as the "Judges for Democracy." In 1989, de la Vega was appointed Director General of Services in the Ministry of Justice and later served on the cabinet of the Committee of Directors for Legal Cooperation in the Council of Europe. In 1994, de la Vega was appointed Deputy Minister of Justice by the Felipe Gonzalez Government, a post she vacated following the electoral victory of the Popular Party in 1996. During the Aznar administration, de la Vega was secretary general of the Socialist Party's parliamentary group.

15. (C) De la Vega has a reputation as a skilled, tough-minded politician and as a capable manager. Her style is friendly, but precise and business-like. She has visited the U.S., but is not especially familiar with U.S. society or with the USG. Nevertheless, she seemed favorably disposed towards the USG and to greater contact with USG officials.

MANZANARES